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ABSTRACT

Suggestions for combining cultural exposure and language instruction through class activities geared to American holidays are outlined. General information about gathering holiday-related realia and instructional materials from local newspapers and magazines is provided, and four specific holidays are highlighted. For each holiday, sources of background information and classroom activities are noted. The holidays include New Year's Day, Groundhog Day, President's Day, and Valentine's Day. Additional how-to ideas, games, and miscellaneous activities that can be related to holidays are listed, and sample planning sheets are appended. (MSE)

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American Holidays: Culture and Language Learning Combined

We want to show our ESL/EFL students not only how Americans behave but also what they believe in-- their customs and traditions. American attitudes have been shaped to some extent by our national heritage. Ideally, the more our students know about American culture, the better they can understand the people who experience it. The idea behind teaching culture through language is to describe and analyze rather than to evaluate. Although we, as teachers, sometimes tend to create a mythical "typical American" to pin all our generalizations upon, we must be very careful not to imply that all Americans behave in the same way and share the same ideals. Deep insight into the American culture requires extensive reading, careful observations, and most important of all, participation in American society. Perhaps through an understanding of our holidays, our foreign students will learn more about our society and be able to take part in it and enjoy the community in which they live.

Not all the holidays and celebrations will be covered in depth. I have provided you with a list of some of the important holidays for each month and a space to jot down notes for lesson planning. (See sample 1) In addition to the holidays I have listed, you may wish to add some of your local festivities. For example, in Florida we celebrate the Grant Seafood Festival in February, the Plant City Strawberry Festival in March and the Sidewalk Art Festival in April, etc. Most of the materials I have included come from our local Space Coast newspaper, "Florida Today" published in Brevard county by the Gannett Co. I am sure your own local newspapers will provide you with a wealth of realia. Local newspapers and magazines will also serve as an excellent source of information for the origin of some of our holidays, the ways they were celebrated in the past, and how they are being celebrated now.

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When your foreign students begin to learn the months of the year in English, this is a good time to give them an overall view of the holidays celebrated in the United States. You can devise an exercise to match up the holiday with the month in which it is celebrated. (See sample 2) Then, as you proceed through the school year, you can tailor the holidays for that month to meet your classroom needs - be it structure, pronunciation, listening skills, vocabulary building, reading or writing.

How can you go about gathering and utilizing materials for your classes?

1. Set up a filing system and have a folder available for each holiday. Into this folder put any materials or information that you can find pertaining to that holiday. Remember that magazines, newspapers, advertisements and greeting cards provide a wealth of materials.

2. Note the activities which are taking place in your community and get your students involved in participating in some of these activities. It's a wonderful "hands-on" experience. It not only gives the people in the community a chance to meet and interact with some of the foreign students and learn about their country and its culture, but it also gives the foreign students a chance to practice their English and take an active part in community festivities.

3. Combine culture and language learning by coordinating the subject matter of the lesson with the holiday for that day, week or month.

Now let me share some of my ideas on how you can utilize the materials you have collected.

New Year's Day

A. Background Information

Most newspapers have articles providing background information about each holiday. These articles can be used with advanced students for both reading practice and discussion. It is especially useful because it catches the student's interest by asking interrogative word questions - a good technique for our students to acquire in starting a discussion or when writing a composition. The students can talk about WHEN and HOW New Year's is celebrated in the United States and in their countries.

B. Some Classroom Activities

Our local newspaper was my source for these clippings and ideas.

1. The Year in Review-it was the BEST of times, it was the WORST of times.

   19-- Headlines

   This is a good exercise for practicing the past tense. Students can write about what happened in their countries in the past year. (See sample 3)

   Looking Ahead-Predictions

   This is a good exercise for getting your students to use modals. (See sample 4)

   New Year's Resolutions

   Have your students make up their own list of resolutions. They can use expressions such as "I resolve" plus an infinitive phrase. (See sample 5)

2. Vocabulary Building

   The teacher can give examples of terms associated with New Year's Eve and see if the students can add to this list. These expressions can also be used in writing a composition about New Year's Eve. (See sample 5)

3. New Year's Day Bowl Line-Up

   Good practice for intermediate and advanced students.

   A. Practice with Interrogative Word Questions

      1. Where is the Rose Bowl?
      2. Who is playing at the Rose Bowl?
      3. What time is the game going to be shown on TV?
      4. What channel is the game being shown on?
      5. What does "bowl" refer to when we're talking about football games?

      Can you think of other expressions that contain the word "bowl"?

      Soup bowl

      Cereal bowl

      To bowl

      6. Why is the stadium in Orlando called "the Citrus Bowl"?
      7. Why is the stadium in New Orleans called "the Sugar Bowl"?, etc.

4. Culture Capsule - Bowl and Brunch Food Guide

The idea of having brunch and watching the games is an interesting part of American culture in itself. Students can be encouraged to go to restaurants in the area to have brunch and see the games on a big-screen TV set. It's an excellent way for them to join in the fun (especially for those who are stuck on campus and have nowhere to go), practice their English, and make new friends. Even the term "bowl and brunch" can elicit good pronunciation practice excercises for these students who have problems with the "b" sound.

5. MADD - Ask your students what this stands for. This association stresses "if you drink, don't drive; if you drive, don't drink."

   a. What do you think happened to this man? (Visual of a man with a hangover.) What is he thinking about? Write a composition about this picture.

   b. Take note - Use the command form. What advice can you give to a fellow student about drinking, drugs, cheating, etc.?

6. Newspaper Ads--To Teach How Much and How Many

Note the prices of the articles inside the New Year's bells. (Use Supermarket ads.)

   a. How much does a dozen of eggs cost?

   b. How many slices are there in a package of sliced American cheese?, etc.

   c. Why do we have year end or clearance sales?

   d. What does "clearance sale" mean?

Groundhog Day

My advanced structure class was working on a unit dealing with reason, purpose, contrast and result clauses, so on Groundhog Day I decided to combine language and culture with this exercise. (See sample 6) Some of their answers were:

We celebrate Groundhog Day

Reason -
- because it's a tradition in the U.S.
- because of tradition.
- since it's an American custom.
- since Americans want to know if there will be six more weeks of winter.

(- in order to know when spring will arrive.
Purpose - (- so that we can know if spring will come early.
(- for fun.

(- although it's not an important holiday.
(- even though the groundhog doesn't know
Contrast - (the difference.
(- in spite of the fact that there's no
(scientific proof that he sees his shadow.

Presidents' Day

Activities

1. Newspaper Ads For:
   a. Pronunciation Practice (Use car ads)
      Push, Pull, Tug or Tow
   b. Idiomatic Expressions
      What does the expression "by George" mean?
      What does the expression "buy, George" mean?
      What's the difference in intonation?
      Why did the bank use the expression "buy, George" in it's ad?
   c. Discussion (Use furniture ads)
      What has George Washington done?
      How many cherry trees did he cut down?
      Did he use a saw or an axe? (difference in the use of a/an)
      Why is he smiling?
      Why is he sitting in a "Lazy-Boy" chair?
      Have you heard the story about George Washington and the cherry tree?
      I blackened out the brand names of furniture and used these spaces to see if the students could name four nouns, verbs and adjectives relating to this picture. Then I asked them to write a composition utilizing the parts of speech they had listed.

2. Fun and Games (Use ads)
   a. Here's a picture of George Washington crossing the St. John's River. Do you know where the St. John's River is located? Did Washington

really cross this river? Where is George Washington going with all that furniture? Are there alligators in the rivers in your country? Are there alligators in the Delaware River?

b. Try a Presidential Puzzler

1. Scramble game - Scramble the names of past U. S. presidents to see if the students can unscramble them.

   Example: 1. N A G A R E
   2. O N X I N
   3. T E C A R R

2. Put the pieces of the puzzle together to see who this famous person is. (Use the head of Lincoln or Washington.)
3. Fun-fare - Have the class read a story about George Washington's life. Then see if they can answer questions about his life.

Valentine's Day

There is a wealth of materials for Valentine's Day.

A. Background Information - Readings for Intermediate and Advanced Levels

How did Valentine's Day originate?

How is this day celebrated?

1. The legend of St. Valentine's Day. (Articles can be found in local newspapers or in the library.)
2. "Hey, Valentine! You've gotta have a heart!"
   Utilize a good article for general information about the heart. What more appropriate time to learn about the heart and it's functions than on Valentine's Day!

B. Activities

1. Have students make a valentine family tree to give to their parents or grandparents.
   a. Teachers in the elementary schools can have a valentine balloon tree on the bulletin board, and each child can paste his/her picture on one of the hearts and write his/her name below the picture.
   b. Children can cut out pictures of their favorite animals and paste them on each heart and write the name of the animal below.

This can be a good vocabulary building exercise. (See sample 7)

2. Make your own valentine cards or gifts.
   a. Have the students make out a personal gift certificate or their own valentine cards.
   b. Have the students write their own valentine love lines on their cards. Examples of these love lines appear in the local newspapers. (Good for all levels)

3. Cartoons are wonderful culture capsules in themselves. Utilize these by writing out the words inside the balloons, and have the students make up their own dialogs.

4. A picture is worth a thousand words. (Use pictures from magazines)
   Who do you think this man bought this huge valentine for?
   Write a composition about this picture.

5. Vocabulary building exercises are always helpful.
   How many phrases can you think of that contain the word "heart"?
   After the students have made their lists, the teacher can make up an exercise so that the students can practice using these expressions. (See sample 8)

6. Newspaper ads can be used. Use one with the days of the week and the dates.
   When is Valentine's Day?
   On what day of the week is Valentine's Day?
   What kind of gifts do we give on Valentine's Day?
   How much does a box of chocolates cost?
   (One ad can provide a lot of practice on numbers, dates, days of the week and prices.)

7. Games are fun to use. For games the students can learn expressions such as "flip a coin", "heads or tails". They also learn how to follow directions and practice using numbers - "go back 2", "go ahead 3", etc. They can also learn new expressions with terms such as "go to the red rose", "go to cupid", "go to the lovebirds", etc. A matching game is good for practicing the letters of the alphabet.

8. "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach." Hand out simple recipes to the class. Have the students practice by reading these recipes so they can learn how to measure and assemble ingredients for cooking. (This is good for a survival skills class or continuing education classes.) Teen-agers, too, enjoy making sweets and like to try their hand at cooking and baking for their loved ones.

Some Additional Ideas for the Holidays

A. "How To" activities are excellent for increasing one's vocabulary, learning how to follow instructions and for writing activities.

1. How to dye Easter eggs
   This is a good way for children to learn the names of the various colors in English and to practice using action verbs and commands.

2. How to set a holiday table
   Survival skill classes can learn the names of dishware, silverware and kitchenware.

3. How to make holiday placemats
   This is a good activity for young children and for continuing education classes. They can learn the names of the types of food associated with each holiday and draw them on their placemats.

4. How to make Halloween costumes and masks

5. How to carve a pumpkin
   How to make a pumpkin pie

6. How to make Christmas cards
   How to decorate a Christmas tree

B. Games are also good for learning how to follow instructions and for vocabulary building exercises.

1. Crossword puzzles (The Pilgrims and Thanksgiving Day)
2. Math problems for St. Patrick's Day
   This provides practice with addition, subtraction, division and multiplication, and at the same time, it gives the students practice using the expressions: plus, minus, divided by and times.

3. Find the hidden objects. The headless horseman seems to have lost more than his head! (Halloween)

C. Miscellaneous
   1. Idiomatic expressions
   2. Songs
   3. Coloring exercises for young children to help them learn more about each holiday.
   4. Reading and pronunciation exercises, "Babbitt the rabbit."

In conclusion, American holidays are an excellent vehicle for teaching English as a foreign language or as a second language to adults and children. Each holiday is unique and can provide your students with cultural information as to American traditions, food, dress, songs and stories. By utilizing our holidays, teachers can provide activities which will enhance all the skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing. All the holidays and special events which are listed on sample 1 have not been covered, but I do hope I have managed to whet your appetites!

Sample 1

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MONTH	HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL EVENTS	DATE CELEBRATED	IDEAS FOR THE CLASSROOM/CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN THE COMMUNITY
JANUARY	New Year's Day Martin Luther King Day (Jan. 15)	January 1 Third Monday	
FEBRUARY	Groundhog Day Valentine's Day President's Day (Lincoln-Feb. 12) (Washington-Feb. 22)	February 2 February 14 Third Monday	
MARCH	St. Patrick's Day Good Friday Easter Sunday	March 17 Springtime	
APRIL	April Fool's Day	April 1	
MAY	Mother's Day Memorial Day (May 30)	Second Sunday Last Monday	
JUNE	Flag Day Father's Day	June 14 Third Sunday	
JULY	Independence Day	July 4	
AUGUST			
SEPTEMBER	Labor Day	First Monday	
OCTOBER	Columbus Day (Oct. 12) Halloween	Second Monday October 31	
NOVEMBER	Veteran's Day Thanksgiving	November 11 Fourth Thursday	
DECEMBER	Christmas New Year's Eve	December 25 December 31	

NOTES:

SPECIAL DAYS OF THE YEAR

WHAT IS A HOLIDAY?

IT IS A SPECIAL DAY WHICH IS SET ASIDE TO CELEBRATE A SPECIAL OCCASION. HOLIDAYS OFTEN REPRESENT RELIGIOUS OR PATRIOTIC EVENTS TOO.

LOOK AT THE FOLLOWING NAMES OF IMPORTANT HOLIDAYS.

1. INDEPENDENCE DAY
2. ST. PATRICK'S DAY
3. MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY
4. COLUMBUS DAY
5. CHRISTMAS DAY
6. HALLOWEEN
7. MOTHER'S DAY
8. VETERAN'S DAY
9. VALENTINE'S DAY
10. THANKSGIVING DAY
11. FLAG DAY
12. LABOR DAY
13. NEW YEAR'S DAY
14. MEMORIAL DAY
15. FATHER'S DAY
16. WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY

WRITE THE NAME OF THE HOLIDAY UNDER THE MONTH TO WHICH IT BELONGS IN THE CALENDAR BELOW.

January	February	March	April	May	June
		St. Patricks Day			Flag Day
July	August	September	October	November	December

PAST TENSE
(NEW YEAR)

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

WHAT HAPPENED IN YOUR COUNTRY IN 19__?

1) POLITICS

2) MEDICINE
   A) DISCOVERIES
   B) TECHNOLOGY, ETC.

3) SPACE PROGRAMS

4) LAWS

5) NATURAL CATASTROPHES
   A) HURRICANES
   B) FLOODS
   C) DROUGHT
   D) TORNADOS, ETC.

6) MAN-MADE CATASTROPHIES
   A) WAR
   B) WEAPONS

7) SPORTS

8) FASHIONS

USING MODALS
(NEW YEAR)

LOOKING AHEAD

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR THE WORLD IN 19__? DO YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE FUTURE? THERE ARE SEERS WHO CLAIM TO KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS AND THEIR PREDICTIONS ARE PUBLISHED IN NEWSPAPERS. FROM THE PREDICTIONS OF THE SEERS IN OUR AREA, BREVARD COUNTY, THEY ALL AGREE ON SEVERE WEATHER CONDITIONS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. WHAT ARE YOUR PREDICTIONS?

1) POLITICS

2) MEDICINE

3) SPACE

4) LAWS

5) CATASTROPHIES

   A) NATURAL

   B) MAN-MADE

6) SPORTS

7) FASHIONS

VOCABULARY BUILDING

FOR THE NEW YEAR

NEW YEAR'S EVE

NOUN	+	VERB
GLASSES		CLINK
BELLS		RING
HORNS		BLOW
PEOPLE		SHOUT CHEER TOAST THE NEW YEAR
FRIENDS + STRANGERS		KISS HUG

NEW YEAR'S REOLUTIONS

I RESOLVE	+ INFINITIVE
	TO TURN OVER A NEW LEAF
	TO SPEND LESS MONEY
	TO STOP SMOKING
	TO GO ON A DIET
	TO LOSE WEIGHT
	TO LEARN ENGLISH

GROUNDHOG DAY

WHAT IS GROUNDHOG DAY?

WHY DO WE CELEBRATE GROUNDHOG DAY?

ANSWER WITH: WE CELEBRATE GROUNDHOG DAY.....

REASON:

BECAUSE _____

BECAUSE OF _____

SINCE _____

PURPOSE:

IN ORDER TO _____

SO THAT _____

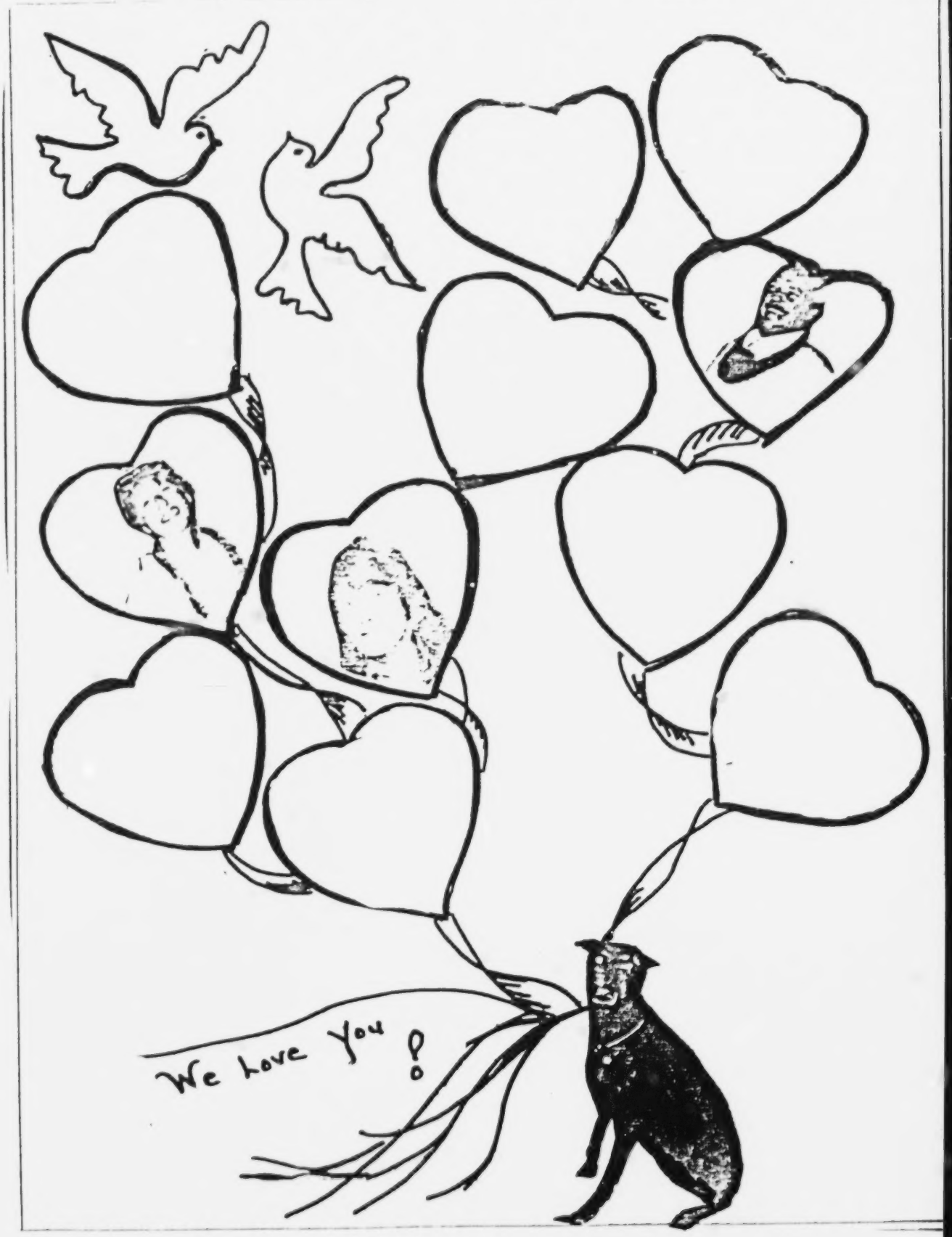
FOR _____

CONTRAST:

ALTHOUGH _____

EVEN THOUGH _____

IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT _____


We Love You !

VOCABULARY BUILDING

WITH A VALENTINE'S DAY HEART

NOUNS	VERBS	ADJECTIVES	IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS
SWEETHEART	TO HEARTEN	HEART SORE	FROM THE BOTTOM OF ONE'S HEART
HEART THROB	TO HAVE A HEART	HEART-STRICKEN	TO ONE'S HEART'S CONTENT
HEART STRING	TO LEARN BY HEART	HEART-SHAPED	WITH ALL ONE'S HEART
HEART SICKNESS	→	HEART SICK	
HEART ATTACK	TO HAVE A CHANGE OF HEART		
HEART BURN	→	HEART BURNING	SENTENCES
HEART BEAT	TO HAVE ONE'S HEART IN ONE'S MOUTH	HALF-HEARTED	HE SPOKE FROM THE HEART.
HEART ACHE	TO HAVE ONE'S HEART IN THE RIGHT PLACE		SHE PRESSED THE CHILD TO HER HEART.
HEART BREAK	TO HAVE ONE'S HEART SET ON SOMETHING	HEART BROKEN HEART BREAKING	THEY LIVED IN THE HEART OF TOWN.
HEARTLAND	TO BREAK A PERSON'S HEART		YOUR WORDS GO TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER.
HEARTINESS	TO TAKE SOMEONE TO HEART	HEARTY HEARTLESS HEART-TO-HEART	HE WAS STILL A CHILD AT HEART.
	TO WEAR ONE'S HEART ON ONE'S SLEEVE	HEART-RENDING HEART-FREE	HE'S ALL HEART.
	TO EAT ONE'S HEART OUT	HEART FELT HEART WARMING	SHE HAS A HEART AS BIG AS GOLD.
		CHICKEN-HEARTED LION-HEARTED FAINT-HEARTED KIND-HEARTED SOFT-HEARTED BROKEN-HEARTED COLD-HEARTED	THAT MOVIE PULLED AT MY HEART-STRINGS. HE PUT HIS HEART & SOUL INTO THE GAME. TAKE HEART AND GO ON TRYING. HAVE A HEART!

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